

HanseMUN presents: MUN Basics

Today: Position Papers, research and conference preparation

So, here we are, stuck at home, nothing to do. No meeting friends, no going shopping, no grabbing lunch at the burger joint. And even worse: No Monday Sessions!

Yes, we know, this is first thing you wept about when the suspension of all public gatherings was announced. It's okay, we did too. But to make sure these next few weeks will not be too bleak and MUN-free for you, we (the board) have decided to use this opportunity to bring you something we've wanted to do for some time now: MUN Basics, delivered weekly to an Internet near you!

Every Monday, we will take you back into the world of Model UN to explain academic details, discuss speech rhetoric and more. On Thursdays, we will explore the history and structure of the United Nations, its committees, and other multinational players. Today we will start by explaining a vital part of every large conference, yet something we sadly don't practice enough; writing position papers.

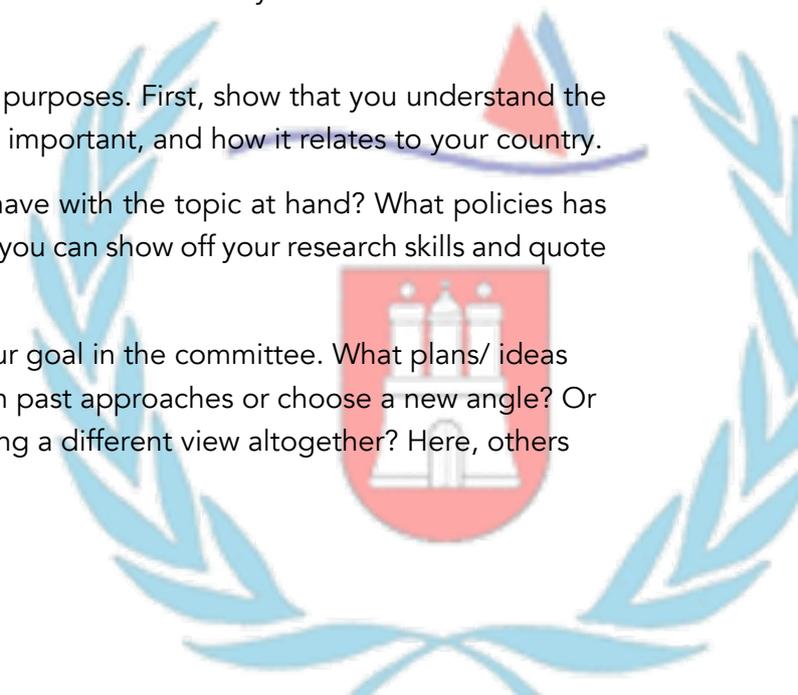
What is a Position Paper?

What is a position paper? If you have only attended our Monday Sessions so far, it can very well be that the term has not crossed your path yet. They are, however, vital to hold well-researched, constructive, and, dare I say, fruitful debates at any big conference. They are short, concise outlines of your country's position on the topic(s) at hand. Usually, delegates get access to the position papers written by their co-delegates before the conference. A well-prepared delegate will thus read over the papers of potential allies before, giving them a solid idea of the political landscape in the committee before the chairs can ask for the first roll call. Position Papers are also often taken into consideration by the chairs when it comes to giving out awards.

A position papers thus must serve three main purposes. First, show that you understand the topic by showing its main challenges, why it is important, and how it relates to your country.

Second, what experience does your country have with the topic at hand? What policies has it pursued; what challenges has it faced? Here you can show off your research skills and quote treaties, resolutions, all that jazz.

Finally, deduced from the first two, lay out your goal in the committee. What plans/ ideas do you have? Do you want to double down on past approaches or choose a new angle? Or are you against the popular position, presenting a different view altogether? Here, others can see what they can expect from you.



The Structure of a Position Paper

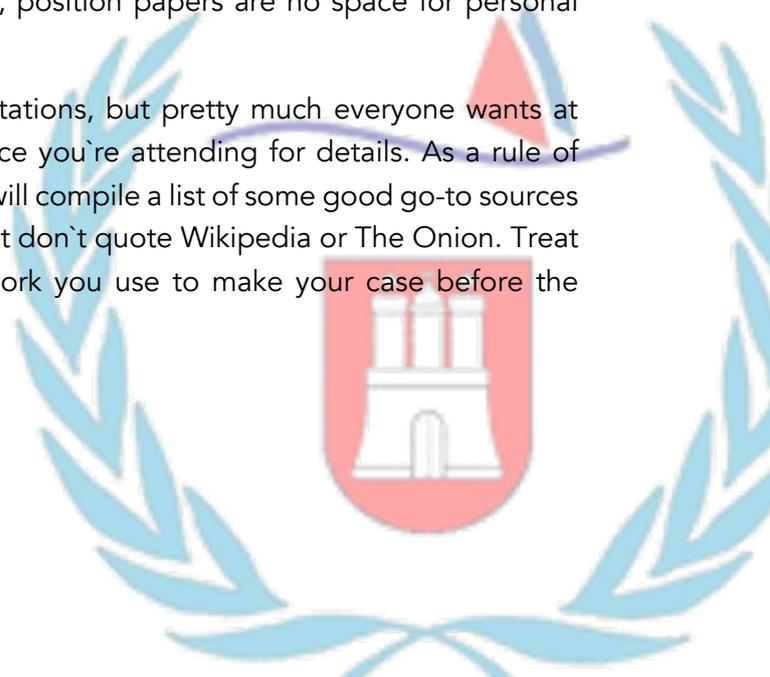
But let's start from the beginning. A typical position paper measures about 1 – 2 pages per topic depending on complexity. After stating your name, committee and country, you'll start with the first part, which should not be more than one nice paragraph. Don't give a whole presentation of the issue here: we have all read the study guide and the Wikipedia page, no need for a third retelling. Just mention the aspects of the topic that are most important to your country.

This leads to the next part: What is your history with the topic? Sometimes, it seems hard to connect a specific country to a quite specific topic. What does the United Kingdom have to do with illegal poaching? In these cases, it is often a good idea to look at your allies and what they have done. Chances are your country is part of a voting bloc in some organization or has some law passed relating to the issue. This way you will find that while the UK has no problem with poaching directly, they have conducted training mission for south African rangers to combat poaching in the past. They have also lobbied for and sponsored You can go into a bit more detail here, but again, not too much. Try to keep at one or two paragraphs. Focus on two or three important things that others should know to understand your action in committee.

Lastly, explain your desired outcome in two steps; first, what you want to achieve, and second, how you want to do that. Both are equally important. We all want *peace*; but by intervention or dialogue? You can always create a vague new sub-organization too pass the buck along; but what should that new body do and in what direction should they work? Both questions need to be answered here, of course always in line with your countries policy. Sometimes this just means reading your foreign ministry's twitter account, sometimes it means extrapolating a general policy from other cases to find out how your government would act if they were to cover the topic. This should be again be about a paragraph long, but make no mistake; it is still the vital part of your position paper.

Now, some things regarding general form: Of course, the working language is English (duh) and you write from the first-person plural. Remember: you act as if you were a representative without agency from your country! Like debate, position papers are no space for personal opinion. Write as if you *are* the country.

Each conference has its own rules regarding citations, but pretty much everyone wants at least some. Check the website of the conference you're attending for details. As a rule of thumb: give sources to every fact you state. We will compile a list of some good go-to sources you can always consult another time, for now just don't quote Wikipedia or The Onion. Treat a position paper for what it is; an academic work you use to make your case before the committee.



And now: Practice!

These points should give you a general idea of how to structure your position paper. We will go into the details of how to do proper research, ideas for taking action and more finer strokes another time. For now, we are offering you the possibility to sharpen your writing skill by participating in our position paper workshop. Below you will find some general info about E-mobility, a topic we have covered in our sessions in the past. If you have the time (we know you do) and want to improve your MUN-skills (we know you want to), why not write up a quick 1 ½ page position paper on that topic? Don't worry, we don't expect any deep research for this, this is just so you can accustom yourself to the structure of a paper. If you want feedback for your paper, you can also send it to us and we will do so. Just pick a country and start writing! For beginners, we recommend European or western countries, but if you are looking for a bigger challenge, you can also try one of the more lesser known places around the world.

Have fun writing, and until the next time!

